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Carter Is Given Counsel on Cuba, Retires to Camp David

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In the latest episode of the international drama over a disputed Soviet military force in Cuba, President Carter yesterday received the advice of 15 retired high officials and then withdrew to Camp David to decide what to do about it.

The chief executive will unveil his conclusions in a televised address Monday at 9 p.m. In addition to explaining how and why a longstanding Soviet troop presence became the cause of a diplomatic impasse between Washington and Moscow, Carter is expected to make public the "appropriate action" he has promised in response.

Vice President Mondale, speaking to a group of editors in Lebanon, N.H., predicted that Carter's address "will show the balance and restraint we need" in dealing with the troops issue.

Mondale also said the Soviet troops "have probably been there in about the same numbers since the mid- or early 1960s." Such an estimate is consistent with Soviet and Cuban claims that the Russian force has been in Cuba since 1962 in approximately the same numbers as at present.

After reviewing the evidence, U.S. intelligence officers have concluded that the Russians had four different

camps in Cuba in 1962 and left one of them in place following the Cuban missile crisis that October.

President John F. Kennedy reported publicly on Jan. 24, 1963, three months after the missile crisis, that "some organized units" of the Soviet military remain in Cuba "exercising" and "building some barracks."

The main argument at present is about the function of 2,800 or so Soviet troops which the United States describes as "a combat brigade" and which the Soviets and Cubans maintain is a "training center."

One of the outside advisers who has been briefed extensively by top officials said "a basic problem" of definitions is involved. He said there is no agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union about the terms "combat brigade" and "training center"; the phrases contain a large area of potential overlap.

U.S. satellite photographs taken Aug. 17 show Soviet troops, tanks and artillery on maneuvers in Cuba, and U.S. intelligence has overheard Soviet references to a brigade headquarters and structure. However, U.S. officials also concede that the Russian force may have training functions.

The Soviet position is that their troops in Cuba have not changed their function since 1962, that their presence does not violate any U.S. Soviet understandings, and that they do not threaten the security of the United States. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, in talks with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, is reported to have said that the Russian force in Cuba will not be made a threat to the United States.

The Russians appear indignant that the question has become such a weighty dispute, and suspicious that Carter has some hidden motive for making it a grave international issue. The Soviets in negotiations with the United States reportedly took the attitude that they did nothing to create the dispute or blow it up to near-crisis proportions, and therefore have no obligation to take action to deflate it.

The U.S. position is that the Soviet force is unacceptable because it is a clandestinely maintained "combat unit" which has just been discovered. American officials have made clear on several occasions that the Russian force is more of a political problem than a military problem for the United States. The United States has asked the Soviets, without success, to withdraw the force or eliminate its "combat capability" in some other fashion in the interest of overall U.S. Soviet relations.

How Carter will deal with all this, in view of the ambiguity of the facts and the extent of the national and international furor created in the past month, is the difficult problem which he confronts at his mountain retreat this weekend.

One Carter objective must be to set out his position in a way that is a convincing basis for the promised U.S. counteractions. At the same time, he must seek to contain the dispute diplomatically and politically so that it does not destroy chances for the strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II) in the Senate.

Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) who is moving ever

II, argued again yesterday that the treaty and the Cuban dispute should not be linked. "I don't think it behooves a great nation to get a case of nervous delirium over 2,000 to 3,000 troops in Cuba that may have been there for several years... and on an island in which we also have a military force numbering about the same," Byrd said. He was referring to the U.S. Navy Base at Guantanamo.

The outside group of elder statesmen, reportedly suggested by Lloyd Cutler and Hedley Donovan, two establishment figures who have recently joined the White House staff, appears designed as much to shore up public support for Carter's policy as to give him new thoughts about what to do.

The "wise man" group, modeled on private advisers called together to counsel President Lyndon B. Johnson on Vietnam in 1967-68, dined with CIA Director Stansfield Turner at the White House Friday night, was briefed on U.S.-Soviet negotiations by Vance yesterday morning, and gave their views to national security affairs adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in late morning and to Carter over a luncheon which followed.

According to participants in the luncheon, Carter led off with a brief statement of his views on the problem and asked the ideas and opinion of each adviser. There was a consensus on some points, but no overall agreement or formal report. At Carter's request, the advisers agreed to keep the talk confidential.

Former defense secretary Clark Clifford was the unofficial leader.

Other members of the 15-man group, twice as large as previously listed by the White House, were: former undersecretary of state George Ball, former national security adviser McGeorge Bundy, former ambassador Averill Harriman, former undersecretary of state Nicholas Katzenbach, former deputy secretary of defense Roswell Gilpatric and former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger.

Also, former Panama Canal negotiator Sol Linowitz, former U.S. high commissioner to Germany John McCloy, former CIA director John McCone, former deputy defense secretary David Packard, former secretary of state William Rogers, former secretary of state Dean Rusk and former CIA, defense and energy chief James Schlesinger. Former governor William Scranton participated in part of the discussions, the White House said.